

# A Vision for Barrington

# 1

## 1. Introduction

A municipal master plan is a unique document in New Hampshire. Although it provides the framework for managing a community's growth and development, the master plan's primary function is "...as a guide in the land use planning process and not as a means in itself of regulating land use."<sup>1</sup> For example, under New Hampshire statutes a municipality must approve specific elements of a master plan before adopting a zoning ordinance to regulate the use of land (RSA 674:18) or prepare a capital improvements program (RSA 674.5). Even the review of the design and layout of land for commercial and multi-family dwelling purposes, commonly referred to as site plan review, is dependent on a community's master plan since this type of activity (site plan review) requires the adoption of a zoning ordinance (RSA 674:43). Similarly, rapidly growing communities that want to regulate and control the timing of development must first adopt a master plan and a capital improvements program (RSA 674:22).

Even though a master plan in New Hampshire, unlike many other states, cannot be directly used to manage a community's growth and development, it does provide the underpinning for municipal land use regulations. Consequently a master plan needs to be periodically revised and updated, especially in rapidly growing communities.

The Town of Barrington has revised the community's master plan several times during the past two decades. During the 1970s the town conducted a community attitude survey that provided the basis for the adoption of a master plan in 1989. The master plan was revised in 1995 and two special planning related studies were prepared in 2001: *An Inventory of Natural Resources* (September); and *Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan* (December). In 2002 a *Master Plan Technical Update* was also completed.

In all of these planning documents various community goals were identified. Key goals included:

- Regulate and control the timing of development (1989 Master Plan).
- Maintain the rural character of Barrington (1989 Master Plan).
- Provide major services such as schools, fire, police and public works at a moderate cost (1989 Master Plan).
- Encourage the development of a town center (1995 Master Plan).

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Loughlin, *Land Use Planning and Zoning: New Hampshire Practice*, Volume 15, Third Edition, page 59.

- Expand the town's economic base by providing for cottage businesses, professional offices and light industry (1995 Master Plan).
- Enhance the town's recreational facilities by providing a beach and park (1995 Master Plan)
- Protect the Isinglass River (1995 Master Plan).
- Reduce curb cuts along Routes 4 and 125 (1995 Master Plan).
- Develop an approach, through recreational and land use planning, to preserve the town's most important natural resources, while promoting a high quality community living environment for its residents. (Barrington Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan - 2001).

In this sequence of master plans and specialized planning studies, one plan does not end where the next one begins, but instead builds on the foundation laid by previous planning and implementation efforts. This is especially true for this 2004 Strategic Master Plan which is regarded as an update, rather than a replacement, of previous master plans. From a statutory standpoint all the underlying information presented in the 1995 Master Plan and the 2002 Technical Master Plan Update is still considered to be applicable. Appropriate statistical data and land use information, however, have been updated in this document in order to evaluate existing and anticipated changes within the community and its region of influence.

This chapter of the plan addresses three primary areas. The next section briefly outlines the nature of the strategic planning process, how it compares to the typical master plan process, and why this type of approach has been employed for this update. The second section discusses how public input was obtained throughout the planning process, as well as how information was disseminated to the residents of the community. Finally, the third section presents strategic objectives that have been shaped by both the analysis conducted and the public discussion that occurred as part of this master planning effort. These objectives are, in essence, a set of principles that will help to guide and measure the success of the community's actions with regard to land planning over the coming years.

## **2. The Strategic Planning Process**

Barrington's strategic planning process seeks to answer three key questions as a means to achieve the desired objectives of the community. The first question is "where are we now?", which involved a retrospective look at recent growth and development trends within the community. The second question, "where are we going?", establishes a long-term image of how residents would like the community to look 10 to 20 years from now. This is the primary focus of the Vision Statement component of Barrington's Strategic Master Plan, and is the vehicle through which the Planning Board and Master Plan Committee sought public input during the master planning process. This public process has resulted in the establishment of a number of *Strategic Objectives* which are outlined later in this chapter. These *Strategic Objectives* were also used as a guide in the preparation of an overall implementation strategy. The implementation strategy answers the third strategic planning question of "how do we get there?", and is presented in the next chapter of this plan.

As discussed in other chapters of this master plan update Barrington has experienced significant residential growth and development. This document and other planning related studies for the community, such as the *Inventory of Natural Resources for Barrington*, indicate that development has had an impact on the character and use of land within the town.

What these circumstances illustrate is that Barrington needs to identify a more targeted approach in this current planning initiative; an approach that will allow the community to focus on a few key land use and development issues, that builds upon the existing inventory of information, and incorporates this data with specific policies and planning recommendations.

This type of targeted approach to planning is often referred to as strategic planning. It has historically been a tool of private sector firms, but has gained wider acceptance by public users (e.g. towns, counties, states) in recent years. Key concepts associated with strategic planning are noted below.

- Concentrates on a few primary issues
- Emphasizes public involvement
- Assesses both strengths and weaknesses
- Defines major forces and changes acting on the community from the outside
- Establishes specific targets to be achieved
- Defines long-term directions for change to be addressed in a short-term operating framework (i.e. the plan is implementation oriented)

Strategic planning and the preparation of a master plan are not mutually exclusive processes. To some degree the *Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan for Barrington* exhibited elements associated with strategic planning in that it was implementation oriented. ***Strategic planning, however, involves less elaborate documentation, is somewhat less formal, and allows for greater flexibility as a means to facilitate more rapid responses to changing conditions.***

### 3. The Public Process

In order for the master plan to be a useful document that can be successfully implemented, it must, to the extent possible, represent the desires and aspirations of the community as a whole. In an effort to develop a shared vision for the community a public process was initiated that gathered input from a broad cross-section of residents and business owners in the community. The first public forums included three *Issues Identification Sessions* where participants were asked to specify both the problems they felt were confronting the community, as well as the positive aspects of life in Barrington. The first issues session was held with the Planning Board and Master Plan Committee in December 2002. The second session, which was open to all members of the community, was held in April of 2003. The third session, which was held specifically with the Barrington Chamber of Commerce in June 2003, was an attempt to focus on concerns of the business community with regard to long-range planning. A summary of the comments received from these issues identification sessions is contained in the appendix of this plan (See Appendix B).

The next two public input sessions were designated as *Vision Forums* where participants were asked to describe how they would like Barrington to look and function 10 to 20 years into the future. The first vision forum, which was held in May of 2003, was an interactive process where participants were divided into workgroups that prepared conceptual maps representing their respective visions for the community. Each workgroup made a presentation of their conclusions at the end of the session. In addition, 15 participants at the vision session were given disposable cameras in order to take pictures of various locations within the community that they either liked or disliked. These images were converted to slides

and presented at the next vision forum, which was designated as a Design Charrette and held in June of 2003. The Charrette was an all-day session which allowed residents, business owners, and public officials to “drop in” at their convenience and meet with design and planning professional who were on hand to discuss their visions for the community (See Appendix C). Input obtained from these two vision sessions is reflected in the *Strategic Objectives*, as well as the three Figures presented in this chapter.

Additional steps were also taken in an effort to include residents who could not attend any of these public sessions. One such effort including placing all of the information prepared as part of this master plan on the town library’s web site. In addition, comments could also be submitted via e-mail by residents who could either not attend these meetings or who wished to present additional points of view regarding various topics.

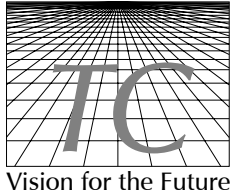
Throughout this public input process, the Planning Board and Master Plan Advisory Committee were involved in a concurrent process of preparing an inventory and analysis (I&A) of existing conditions within the town. This I&A phase included an examination of population and housing, land use, transportation, economic conditions and municipal finances. This information is presented in subsequent chapters of this master plan. As discussed in the previous section, additional inventory information related to natural resources, open space and recreation, and municipal facilities compiled in previously completed planning documents was also evaluated as part of the process. The I & A phase introduced information into the planning process that was used to help shape the strategic objectives and future land use plan that are presented in the remainder of this chapter.

#### **4. Vision for Barrington**

In 2002 the statutes relating to the preparation of municipal master plans in New Hampshire were altered. One significant change was related to the previous requirement of preparing a “General Statement” that involved the identification of goals, principles and policies for the development of the community. The revised statute now requires the inclusion of a “Vision Section” within the master plan. As noted in the new statute, “A vision section [shall provide direction] to the other sections of the plan. The section shall contain a set of statements which articulate the desire of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.” [RSA 674.2-II (a)].

This section presents the concepts that were used to establish criteria for an implementation strategy, which is described in the next chapter of this master plan. These concepts, referred to as *Strategic Objectives*, are based on input received during the various public meetings, and then refined by the members of the Planning Board to reflect their knowledge of specific planning related issues.

As discussed earlier, the public participation process helped to frame a number of major categories within which residents identified their shared vision for the future of Barrington. These broad categories were then used as the basis for grouping the *Strategic Objectives* presented in this chapter.



## *Transportation and Circulation*

### **Strategic Objectives**

- TC-1.** Give priority to the repair of existing streets, roads and bridges with community-friendly solutions. Wherever a street, road or bridge needs to be redesigned and reconstructed, plan and undertake redevelopment efforts in collaboration with the affected neighborhood. This should be a “context-sensitive” project approach - one that fully protects and preserves existing neighborhoods and landscape while addressing mobility for all transportation modes.
- TC-2.** Discourage the alignment of any new major highway, or upgrading of an existing roadway into a limited access highway, that will significantly disrupt Barrington’s scenic and rural character, quality of life, and adequate access to all areas of the community by emergency vehicles.
- TC-3.** Provide for a transportation system that is consistent with Barrington’s character and with the roadway’s functional classification system.
- TC-4.** Encourage the town, as well as regional and state agencies, to address transportation planning in a coordinated manner, especially the use and access to the Route 125 corridor.
- TC-5.** Minimize town expenditures for roadway improvements by maximizing, to the extent possible, the use of state and federal funds and private development mitigation measures such as impact fees.
- TC-6.** Encourage opportunities for alternate transportation modes, such as walking, biking, and public transportation, through local and regional public/private cooperative efforts in transportation planning
- TC-7.** Ensure adequate vehicle carrying capacity on the Class I and II traffic corridors to maintain mobility, safety, and access to land and collector and minor roads.
- TC-8.** Encourage the creation of service roadways in existing and commercial areas on the Route 125 corridor along with provisions for mass transit and park and ride facilities.
- TC-9.** Avoid accepting responsibility for maintaining roads which are not through roads.
- TC-10.** Preserve and enhance scenic road corridors that define the rural and historic character of the

community.

**TC-11.** Enhance existing and future targeted business development areas.

**TC-12.** Support and enhance the establishment of a town center through multiple transportation modes, street scape improvements, and adequate parking facilities. (See Figure 1-1 Schematic Town Center Concept)



## *Land Planning and Design Standards*

### **Strategic Objectives**

**LP-1.** Prepare a revised zoning ordinance that includes the following.

- Promote different types of land uses, and densities as appropriate, within Barrington
- Utilize residential cluster development in designated areas of the community
- Identify specific locations that can only be developed for non-residential uses
- Consider changes in the minimum lot size at certain locations in Barrington
- Establish a town center zone that permits a mix of residential and non-residential land uses
- Establish standards (e.g. smaller unit size) for the construction of elderly housing

**LP-2.** Revise subdivision and site plan review regulations in order to protect key natural resources features and characteristics.

**LP-3.** Encourage new land development activities, through density incentives, to set aside more open space that provides natural resource protection, wild life habitat, and passive recreation uses.

**LP-4.** Ensure that areas set aside in the future for open space are distributed through the town.

**LP-5.** Promote an awareness of historic properties and sites throughout Barrington.

**LP-6.** Adopt design review guidelines for significant developments throughout the community. The purpose of design review guidelines to preserve and enhance the town's cultural, economic and historical resources by providing for a detailed review of changes in land use as well as the appearance of structures and sites which may affect these resources. The review process is intended to:

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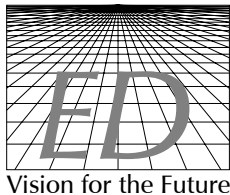
- Enhance the social and economic viability of the town by preserving property values and promoting the attractiveness of the town as a place to live, visit and shop;
- Encourage the conservation of buildings and groups of buildings that have aesthetic or historic significance;
- Prevent alterations that are incompatible with the existing environment or that are of inferior quality or appearance; and
- Encourage flexibility and variety in future development.

**LP-7.** Enhance the Route 125 corridor through quality mixed-use development and access management. Route 125 is the major arterial highway in Barrington. The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) has made various improvements to the corridor in the past but more are needed, as described in the next chapter. However, there are several smaller measures that can be taken by the town to improve site access, limit or reconfigure curb-cuts, and improve intersections with poor safety, that can and should be accomplished without significant changes to the highway's existing two-lane design. In order to improve the efficiency, capacity, safety, aesthetics, and economic opportunities on the corridor, several strategies should be considered.

- A. Encourage Nodal Development – Protecting open space and existing vegetative buffers is an important public objective for the Route 125 Corridor. This can be effectively accomplished by encouraging development to locate in established or targeted economic development areas within the corridor, and emphasizing connectedness of the open spaces between the nodes. (See Figure 1-2 Schematic Route 125 Development Concept)
- B. Coordination Between Properties - Outside the state's right-of-way on Route 125, several other improvements could be made. There may be adjoining properties located on the corridor where internal connections can be made. This would promote shared parking and access resulting in fewer trips, turning movements and curbcuts on Route 125.
- C. Aesthetic Impact Management - A Route 125 Overlay District should be established to achieve the following policies.
  - Establish an area of jurisdiction from the edge of the right-of-way with a minimum natural buffer abutting both sides in which limited tree or undergrowth clearing would be permitted
  - Establish limits on impervious surfaces and provide incentives for protection efforts
  - Control outdoor lighting and provide for attractive commercial signs
  - Adopt strict curb-cut standards for streets intersecting with the corridor
  - Establish a design review process to address the following issues: advertising; outdoor lighting; intersection design; "adopt a highway" program for litter; natural noise attenuation and tree plantings where necessary to screen development.
- D. Frontage Roads - In discussions conducted during the preparation of this master plan, both residents and local officials preferred to see access to the corridor from local streets controlled and coordinated as much as possible. However, there are several undeveloped

land parcels along the corridor that will need access onto Route 125. Future development on these parcels should be reviewed carefully and encouraged to share access with adjacent properties, possibly through frontage road connections to existing local roads, as the opportunity presents itself.

- E. Continue to Communicate with Stakeholders - The Town of Barrington should continue to work with local residents, the business community and other interested groups in preparing traffic and access management plans for the Route 125 Corridor.



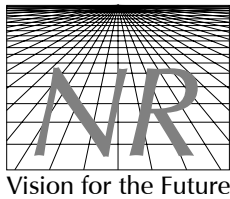
## *Economic Development*

### **Strategic Objectives**

- ED-1.** Support and encourage economic development initiatives that maintain, rather than harm, the town's environment and health.
- ED-2.** Encourage the expansion of non-residential development in Barrington in order to provide for an adequate level of property tax revenues that will support the financing of municipal and school related services.
- ED-3.** Identify specific nodal locations along the Route 125 and 4 corridors for commercial/light industrial development. (See Figure 1-2)
- ED-4.** The town should establish a non-profit economic development corporation in order to provide assistance in promoting economic growth within the community.
- ED-5.** Work with existing businesses and enterprises to encourage their continued operation and/or expansion in Barrington.
- ED-6.** Focus development initiatives on specific market niches including specialized manufacturing and assembly operations, wholesale trade, office for professional service firms, and limited mixed-use projects that could include some retail uses.

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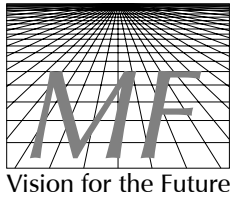
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## *Natural Resources and Open Space*

### **Strategic Objectives**

- NR-1.** The Town of Barrington should endeavor to protect and enhance key natural resources in the community that define the town's rural character such as scenic vistas, river corridors, lakes and ponds, wetlands, groundwater supplies, woodlands, fields and farmland.
- NR-2.** Make open space planning and protection a priority for town boards and departments.
- NR-3.** Establish a multi-faceted approach for open space protection that includes town funded acquisition of key areas and critical environmental lands, as well as the establishment of a private non-profit land trust that can support municipal land protection efforts.
- NR-4.** Promote the preservation of large tracts of unfragmented open space that provide important wildlife habitat and offer opportunities for traditional recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking.
- NR-5.** Groundwater quality and availability in Barrington is an important issue today and will become even more important in the future. Due to the fact that groundwater is the primary water supply in the community, better information about the quality and use of groundwater resources in Barrington will be required for planning purposes and evaluation of future development proposals. This data should be collected from federal, state and local agencies and organizations and used for planning purposes and the evaluation of future development proposals.
- NR-6.** In order to protect the wide variety of environmental and natural resources important to the residents of Barrington, the standards and procedures contained in the town's existing regulations should be examined and, where appropriate, improved.
- NR-7.** The town should evaluate alternatives for determining the existing condition of key environmental attributes within Barrington (especially lakes, ponds and rivers) and then periodically monitor these sites on a regular basis to determine any changes in quality or possible sources of degradation.
- NR-8.** Continue work on creating trail systems of bikeways, walking paths and snowmobile trails throughout Barrington, as well as identify opportunities for connecting the various trail systems. (See Figure 1-3 Conceptual Trails and Natural Resource Corridors)



## *Municipal Facilities*

### **Strategic Objectives**

- MF-1.** Expand the town's impact fee system to involve other forms of municipal capital expenditures such as: roadways; solid waste management, recycling and disposal; recreation; public safety; and municipal office facilities.
- MF-2.** Promote long-range planning for public safety services, such as police, fire and ambulance, in order to ensure that there are adequate facilities at suitable locations to service all areas of the community.
- MF-3.** Incorporate the establishment of a community center into the town's capital facilities planning program.
- MF-4.** Evaluate the potential for creating a limited public water system in Barrington.
- MF-5.** Establish priorities and procedures for acquiring land for recreation needs, including property for a town beach.
- MF-6.** Ensure that there is an adequate system of recreation facilities in place to support all age groups in the community.



## *Regional Cooperative Efforts*

### **Strategic Objectives**

- RC-1.** Work with neighboring communities and regional organizations in addressing natural resource issues such as groundwater protection.
- RC-2.** Participate in regional transportation evaluation and problem solving efforts.
- RC-3.** Support regional initiatives to promote the construction of housing for low-income and elderly families and individuals.

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